

Superintendent's House
Located on what was Magnolia Avenue
Granite
Granite County
Montana

HABS No. MON-16

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
801 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20006

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SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE

Granite, Granite County, Montana

ADDRESS: Located on what was known as Magnolia Avenue in Granite,
Montana.

OWNER: none

OCCUPANT: none

USE: none

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The sturdy one-and-a-half story stone structure, the only masonry residence in the once-busy silver mining town of Granite, was occupied by Thomas A. Weir, superintendent of the Granite Mountain Mining Company. Not only was this the only masonry residence in Granite, but according to reports of the year 1889, it was the only building having its interior plastered.

Thomas A. Weir was closely associated with mining operations in Leadville, Colorado and Granite, Montana. He had been a partner in two mines in the California Gulch area of Leadville. A few months after he sold his share in the mines, a strike was made that richly rewarded the new owner, Meyer Guggenheim.

Superintendent Weir did much to modernize the operations of the mine, improve the working conditions of the men and place the entire operation on a six day rather than a seven day week. Weir had been a Presbyterian Elder in Leadville, and he brought his strong religious beliefs with him to Granite when he moved there in December, 1888. Weir was superintendent of the Granite Mountain Mining Company until the summer of 1893 when the Silver Panic forced shutdown of the mine.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Thomas Weir was born in Colia, a suburb of Cambridge, New York, on February 14, 1855, the son of a wheelwright, John Weir. He studied Civil Engineering at Union College, Schenectady, N. Y., and graduated at the head of his class in 1876. While in college he was a member of the Theological Society and Sigma Tau.

In 1878 Weir went to Nebraska to work for the Missouri River Commission, and the next year was transferred to the Mississippi River Commission as an assistant in survey work. In 1880 he resigned his position and moved to Leadville, Colorado where he engaged in general mining surveying work until August of that year when he became Secretary and Mining Engineer for the A.Y. & Minnie Mine.

Weir and three others, Harsh, Work and Graham, were partners in this enterprise. Graham had borrowed money from his friend, Meyer Guggenheim to pay the previous owners, Harsh and Work, for his share of the mine. A short time later Guggenheim bought out both Work and Weir; for the sum of \$5,000 he obtained half interest in the mine (Graham and Harsh retained the other half).

Within a few months a rich strike was made, and by 1882 A.Y. & Minnie was yielding \$2,000 a day in silver. By 1887 the mines had produced nine million ounces of silver and eighty-six thousand tons of lead -- they averaged over one million dollars gross every two years.

In December, 1888 Weir, then General Manager of the A.Y. & Minnie, was hired as the new superintendent of the expanding Granite Mountain Mining Company at Granite, Montana. At the time of his employment the company was building a new mill at Rumsey (below Granite) and construction on the tramway was proceeding extremely slowly. Weir soon had things under control, and he then turned his attention to the working and living conditions of his men.

The Granite Mountain Star reported on June 22, 1899, that Superintendent Weir had ordered the fumigation of the bunkhouses and a general cleaning up -- new bunks and clean bedding replaced the worst ones to avoid further sickness among the miners. Weir also tried hard to break an old habit of the men: the miners, their clothes soaked with sweat, would come out of the shaft and make a mad dash for home or the nearest saloon, sometimes in thirty and forty degrees below zero weather. The death rate from pneumonia was high in Granite. Weir had a "drying room" constructed at the shaft house to assist, but many miners ignored the order to change into dry clothing before going outside. Also under Weir's direction a new multi-storied hospital (still standing) was built.

Weir informed the mill foreman that henceforth he wanted the mill to operate six days a week rather than seven. The foreman replied that he could not profitably run the mill on a six day week. Weir answered by saying that he knew of a mill foreman in Leadville who was capable of operating on a six day week, and asked if he should send for the man. The Granite Mountain mine and mill crews went to work on a six day schedule immediately.

Little is known of the origin of the stone residence. Reports of 1889 show that it was there then, and that Weir and his wife were living in

it. Probably it had been built several years earlier by the company for Superintendent Plummer, Weir's predecessor. The second story under the steep gable roof may have served as an office. Access to this level was gained by a gangplank bridgeway from the uphill slope at the rear of the building. There is no inside connection between the two floors, nor has there ever been.

The Philipsburg Mail of November 8, 1888 (just prior to Superintendent Weir's arrival in Granite) mentioned the moving of the Granite Mountain Mining Company's office to their new building near the Baskett Co. store. This is not the stone building on Magnolia Avenue.

Magnolia Avenue was referred to by the townspeople as "Silk Stocking Row", for here the mine officials, doctor and the white-collar employees lived. The stone building stands today in relatively good condition considering the long time that it has been vacant.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL AND REFERENCES

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Popham, Fremont, "The Early Activities of the Guggenheims in Colorado", Colorado Magazine, vol. 26-27, Jan. 1950.
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Wolle, Muriel, Montana Pay Dirt, Sage Books, Denver, 1963.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions - 32'-0" x 42'-0" one-and-a-half story masonry structure.

Foundation - stone.

Openings - Entrance: 3'-0" x 7'-0" door (now gone) with a transom light above. Kitchen door similar.

Windows: now gone; believed to have been double-hung wood windows with a decorative brick eyebrow head trim. Dormer windows (two) on the front facade of the building. A half-circle window on the north facade in the gable end. A narrow vertical rectangular unit occupies a similar space in the south gable.

Roof - wood shingled gable roof, approximately 37° pitch.

Chimney - brick.

INTERIOR

Floor Plan - A small entry centrally located on the west facade opens into the living room in the northwest corner of the building; was probably the dining room. A small rectangular back hall behind the entry links the living room and dining room. Behind the living room in the northeast corner is a bedroom, and the kitchen with its outside door is in the southeast corner. These rooms are separated by a food vault, the walls of which are of brick ranging in thickness from 1'-0" to 2'-3" and plastered on the inside with a cement floor. Two doors opened into this area, one from the kitchen and the other from a corner of the living room.

The second floor has two rooms separated by the outside entry and a narrow hallway running from the entry on the rear wall to the front wall. Access was gained by a bridgeway to the upper road behind the building.

Flooring - T & G flooring.

Wall and Ceiling Finish - The exterior stone walls are furred with 2 x 4's and finished with lath and plaster and a decorative wide wallpaper border at the top of the wall on the first floor. The second floor has random-width board walls. Ceiling of the first floor is plastered while that of the second floor has exposed 2 x 4 rafters and sheathing visible.

Doors - missing.

Trim - plain; squared edge.

Heating - wood stoves (missing).

GENERAL SETTING

Located in the north, northwest section of the town on one of the higher streets that looks down upon the valley floor and general town area.

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May 1967

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